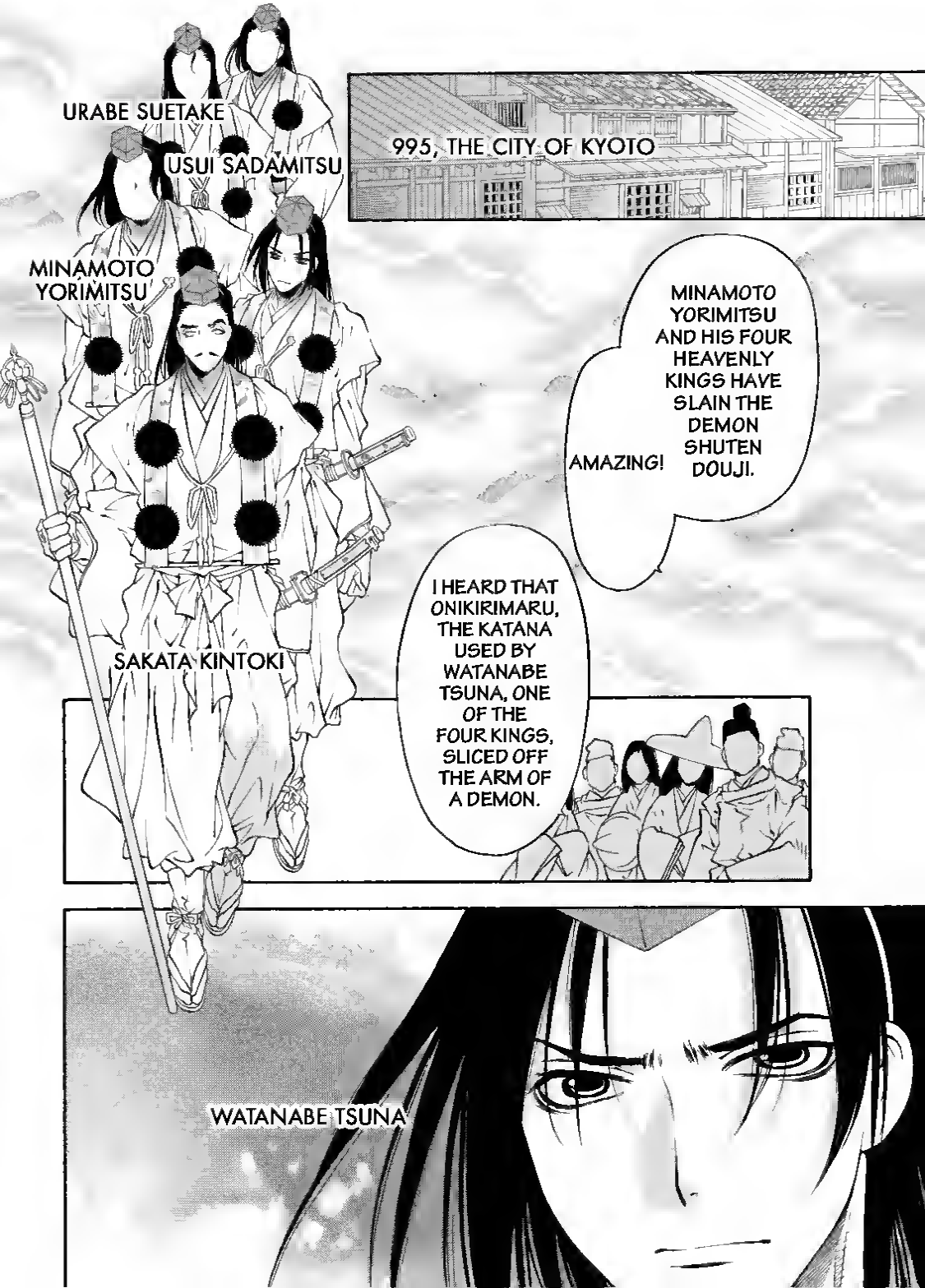
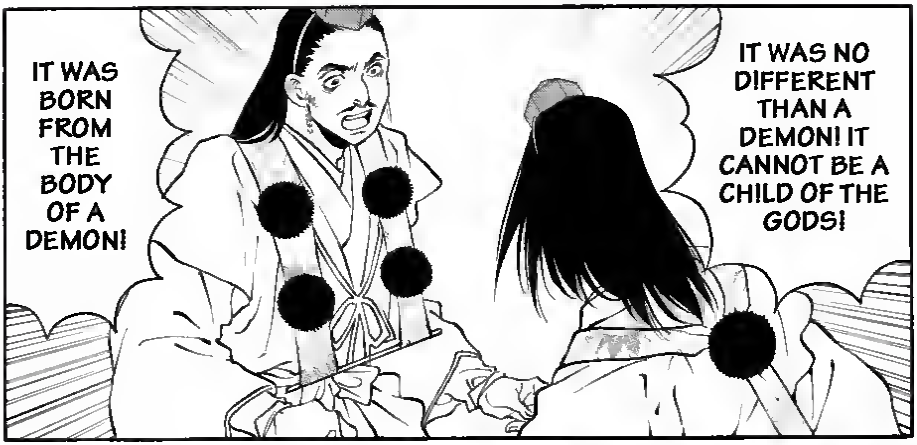
THE LEGEND OF ONIKIRIMARU

CHAPTER 14: THE DEMON WOMAN KUREHA

KEI KUSUNOKI

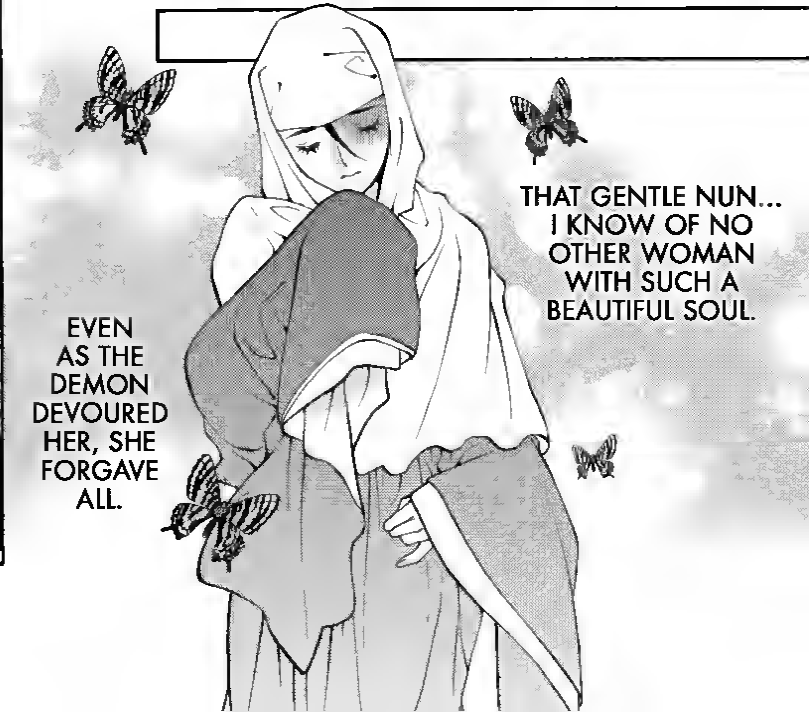

URABE SUETAKE
USUI SADAMITSU
MINAMOTO YORIMITSU
SAKATA KINTOKI
995, THE CITY OF KYOTO
MINAMOTO YORIMITSU AND HIS FOUR HEAVENLY KINGS HAVE SLAIN THE DEMON SHUTEN DOUJI.
AMAZING!
I HEARD THAT ONIKIRIMARU, THE KATANA USED BY WATANABE TSUNA, ONE OF THE FOUR KINGS, SLICED OFF THE ARM OF A DEMON.
WATANABE TSUNA

WELL DONE, YORIMITSU. YOU HAVE SLAIN THE DEMON OF MT. OOE.
EMPEROR
I AM GRATEFUL, SIR.
EXCUSE ME, YOUR HIGHNESS.
IT WAS THE CHILD OF THE GODS AND BUDDHAS WHO DEFEATED SHUTEN DOUJI, JUST AS THE BUDDHAS PREDICTED.
TSUNA, WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?


IT WAS BORN FROM THE BODY OF A DEMON!
IT WAS NO DIFFERENT THAN A DEMON! IT CANNOT BE A CHILD OF THE GODS!

IT IS THE ACCUSED CHILD OF A DEMON, BORN BY SUCKING AWAY SHUTEN DOUJI'S LIFE FORCE!

THAT WAS BECAUSE SHUTEN DOUJI SWALLOWED THE NUN WHO WAS PREGNANT WITH THE CHILD...


EVEN AS THE DEMON DEVOURED HER, SHE FORGAVE ALL.
THAT GENTLE NUN... I KNOW OF NO OTHER WOMAN WITH SUCH A BEAUTIFUL SOUL.

THE MORTAL ENEMY OF A DEMON COULD NOT BE A GOD
THAT'S TRUE...

IT WAS FAR TOO EVIL TO BE CALLED A GOD.
IT SAID ITS MISSION WAS TO SLAY DEMONS, YET IT HAD SUCH MURDEROUS INTENT TOWARDS HUMANS.
BUT THE BLADE IT HELD IS THE ONLY THING THAT CAN CUT THE FLESH OF A DEMON.
IT IS A BLADE WORTHY OF THE NAME ONIKIRI, THE "DEMON CUTTER."

IT IS ONIKIRI-MARU!

AAAAAUGGGH!!
SHINSHUU – TOGAKUSHI

DON'T GO INTO THAT MOUNTAIN.
WHAT'S WRONG, TAIHEI?
GOT IT, TAIHEI?
SURE, IT'S GOT A LOT OF HERBS, BUT IT'S AN ILL-OMENED MOUNTAIN.
TAIHEI!

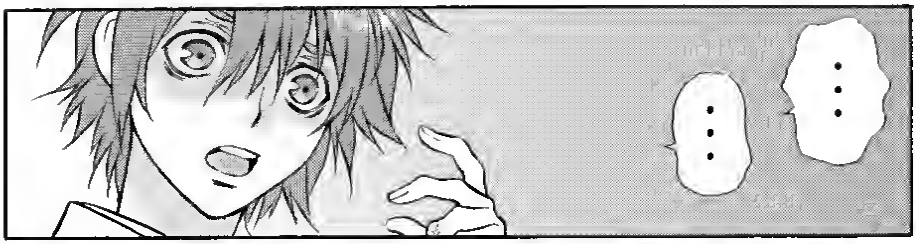
カサッ
RUSTLE

HUFF
HUFF
HUFF

...

...
CLINK

SLICE!!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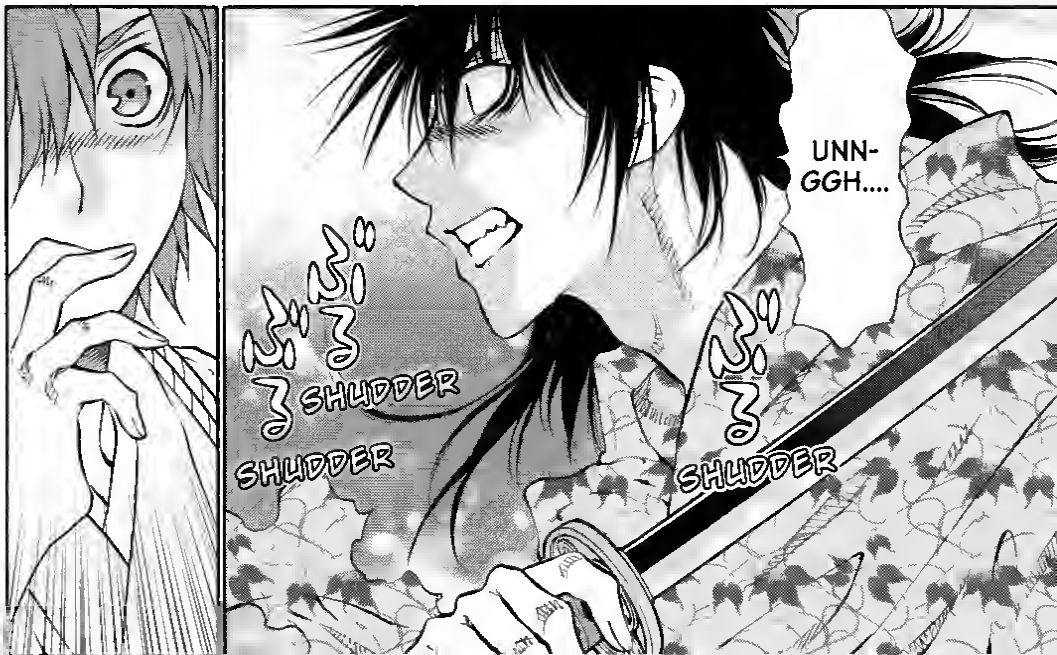
UNGH...
HRRR-
NGH....


UNN-
GGH....
SHUDDER
SHUDDER
SHUDDER

I'VE FOUND YOU.
MY CHILD, TSUNEWAKAMARU!

YOU'RE MUTE, SO NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, YOU CAN'T CALL FOR HELP.

HAAAH...

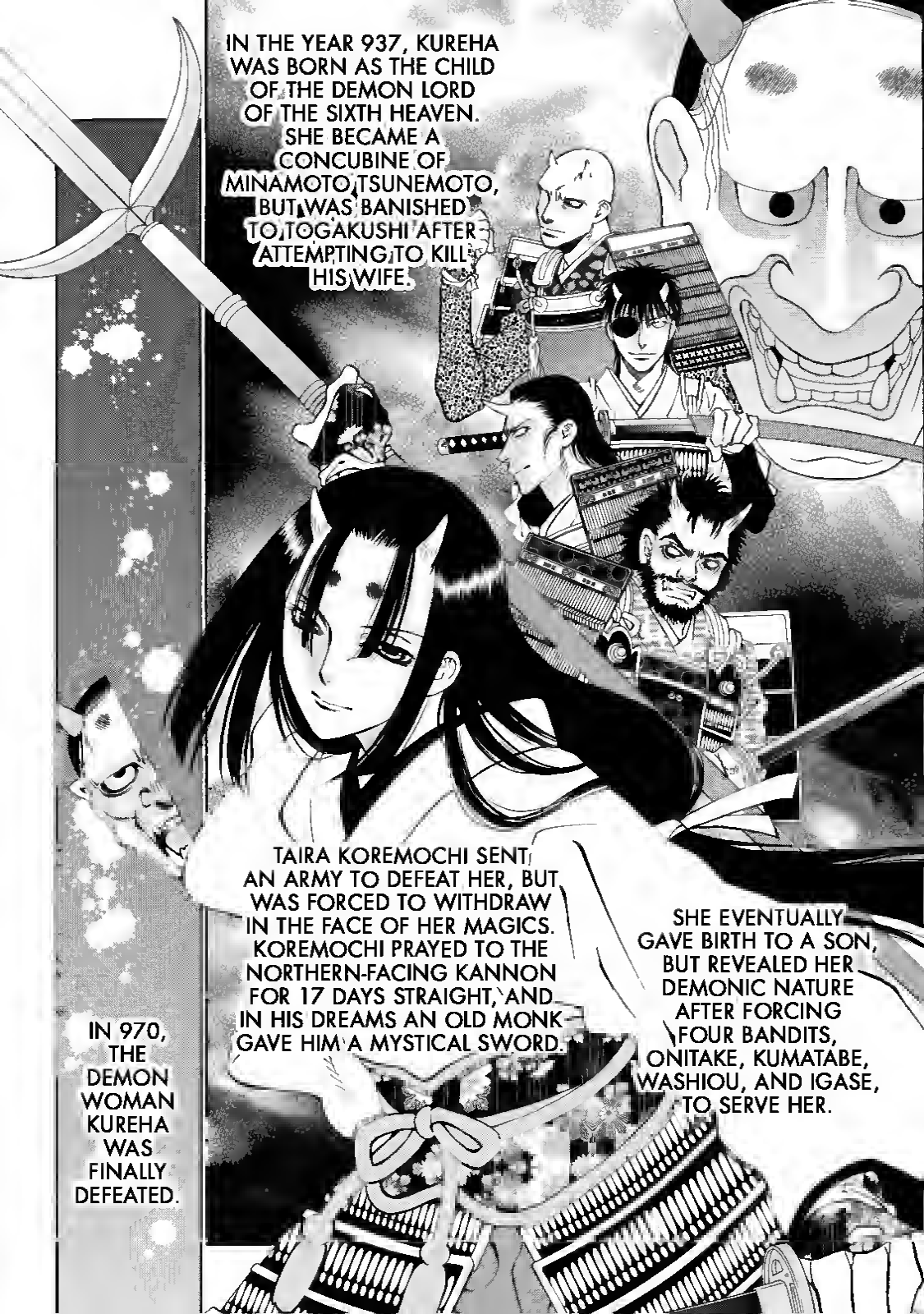
HAAAH...

...

TAIHEI! YOU OKAY?

RUSTLE

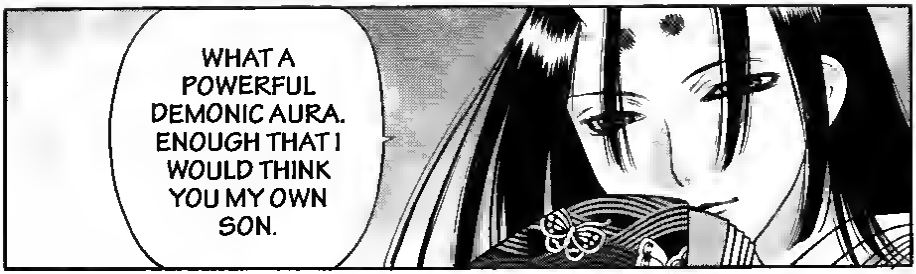
THE AREA UP AHEAD IS WHERE THE DEMON WOMAN KUREHA ONCE HAD A PALACE AND BORE A CHILD.
IT'S SAID THAT SHE'S IMMORTAL.
YOU'RE NOT FROM AROUND HERE, SO MAYBE YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT KUREHA?


IN THE YEAR 937, KUREHA WAS BORN AS THE CHILD OF THE DEMON LORD OF THE SIXTH HEAVEN. SHE BECAME A CONCUBINE OF MINAMOTO TSUNEMOTO, BUT WAS BANISHED TO TOGAKUSHI AFTER ATTEMPTING TO KILL HIS WIFE.
TAIRA KOREMOCHI SENT AN ARMY TO DEFEAT HER, BUT WAS FORCED TO WITHDRAW IN THE FACE OF HER MAGICS. KOREMOCHI PRAYED TO THE NORTHERN-FACING KANNON FOR 17 DAYS STRAIGHT, AND IN HIS DREAMS AN OLD MONK GAVE HIM A MYSTICAL SWORD.
SHE EVENTUALLY GAVE BIRTH TO A SON, BUT REVEALED HER DEMONIC NATURE AFTER FORCING FOUR BANDITS, ONITAKE, KUMATABE, WASHIOU, AND IGASE, TO SERVE HER.
IN 970, THE DEMON WOMAN KUREHA WAS FINALLY DEFEATED.

HER CHILD, TSUNE-WAKAMARU, WENT MISSING AFTERWARDS.
THERE WAS A MAN HERE WHO DISAP-PEARED?
W-WHAT?
WELL, HE'S DEAD NOW...

THIS MOUNTAIN IS A PLACE WHERE DEMONS ARE BORN, AND WHERE DEMONS DO NOT DIE.
I'M SURE HE'S PROBABLY FOOD FOR KUREHA BY NOW.
はっ
GASP

GRAB
ばっ


WHAT A POWERFUL DEMONIC AURA. ENOUGH THAT I WOULD THINK YOU MY OWN SON.

THAT KIMONO SUITS YOU WELL.

HNN.... URGH...

WHY ARE YOU SO ANGRY THAT YOU'VE FORGOTTEN HOW TO SPEAK?
Y-YOU DEMON... IF YOU ARE A DEMON... I WILL KILL YOU!
I SEE. YOU ARE A DEMON, AND YET NOT A DEMON.
AND THE GODS DWELL WITHIN YOUR BLADE.
TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED.
STAY AWAY FROM ME, DEMON WOMAN!

THE PEOPLE OF THIS VILLAGE CALL ME KUREHA-SAMA.
I DISLIKE CONFLICT, AND I'VE CHOSEN TO BEAR A CHILD AND LIVE AS A MOTHER.
I'M DIFFERENT THAN THE KUREHA WHO WAS SLAIN AND BURIED BY TAIRA KORE-MOCHI.
ANOTHER DEMON WOMAN?
THIS PLACE HAS THE OLDEST LEGENDS OF DEMONS IN JAPAN, DATING ALL THE WAY BACK TO THE ASUKA ERA.
IS IT REALLY SO STRANGE THAT A WOMAN WHO BECAME A DEMON COULD BE TWO BEINGS: A BRIGAND AND A MOTHER?

I AM THE DEMON WOMAN KUREHA, WHO SPLIT INTO TWO OUT OF LOVE FOR TSUNEWAKAMARU, MY SON.
I MISTOOK YOU FOR HIM, WHICH IS WHY I BROUGHT YOU HERE...
OH, HOW SAD. MY TSUNE-WAKAMARU, WHEREVER HAVE YOU GONE?
WHERE IS YOUR MOTHER?
WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
I HAVE NO NAME.

I CANNOT FORGIVE THE HUMANS.
I WILL NOT SAVE THE HUMANS.
MY MOTHER WAS LEFT TO DIE BY THE HUMANS AND EATEN BY DEMONS.
IN MY RAGE, I STOLE THE LIFE ENERGY OF SHUTEN DOUJI, THE DEMON WHO DEVOURED MY MOTHER WHILE I WAS STILL IN THE WOMB...
...AND BEARING THIS BLADE, I RIPPED MY WAY OUT THROUGH HIS STOMACH.
BUT I HAVE EVEN LESS FORGIVENESS FOR THE DEMONS WHO KILLED MY MOTHER.

A CHILD OF THE GODS AND BUDDHAS, TAINTED BY DEMONIC AURA... WHO SEEKS A MOTHER?
I SEE.
SAY... WHY DON'T YOU CALL ME YOUR MOTHER?
IF THERE IS NO LONGER A WAY TO BE WORSHIPPED AS A GOD, WHY NOT LIVE HERE AS A DEMON?

COME, CALL ME MOTHER.

PLEASE, TELL MY SON...

...?!
YOU DON'T NEED TO SAVE HUMANS. IF DEMONS DISOBEY, YOU MAY SLAY THEM.
WHO CARES IF I'M NOT TRULY YOUR MOTHER? LET US LIVE TOGETHER IN THIS LAND WHERE DEMONS DO NOT DIE.
CALL ME MOTHER, AND PROTECT ME, MY SON.

MO...
MOTHER...
!!
OH, MY.
I SEE A
FEAST HAS
COME OF
ITS OWN
ACCORD.

THWAP
ブシュ!
LET US EAT THE RAW KIDNEY OF A HUMAN TO CELEBRATE! NOW, MY SON, TEAR OUT HIS KIDNEY!
IF YOU RESOLVE TO LIVE AS A DEMON, THEN SHOW ME!
OH, I SEE YOU CAN'T SPEAK. THAT MAKES THIS EVEN EASIER.

I REFUSE TO SAVE HUMANS.
I REFUSE...
YOU MAY BE A DEMON. YOU NEED NOT BE A GOD.
BUT AT LEAST BE A DEMON WHO SLAYS DEMONS.

YOU CAN SPEAK?
THAT WAS THE VOICE OF MY MOTHER THAT I HEARD IN THE WOMB!
I CAME WITH A MESSAGE FROM A NUN.
JUST WHO ARE YOU?

DIE, DEMON!
SLAM
YOU SEALED YOUR DEMONIC AURA? THEN YOU... YOU ARE...

YOU ARE MY SON, TSUNEWAKAMARU!
SOME MOTHER YOU ARE, IF YOU CAN ONLY TELL YOUR CHILD BY THEIR DEMONIC AURA.
THIS IS KUREHA'S SON?
CALL MY NAME WITH YOUR VOICE AND GIVE ME YOUR POWER.
MAKE ME EVEN STRONGER!
I KNEW IT. YOU SOUGHT ME BECAUSE YOU WANTED TO RECOVER THE POWER LOST WHEN YOUR OTHER HALF DIED.

BE GONE, FOUL DEMON!
ROOOOOAR
IN THIS LAND, DEMONS WILL NEVER DIE.
HEH HEH HEH. YOU'RE WASTING YOUR TIME.
GET BACK, TSUNE-WAKAMARU
IF SHE IS A DEMON, THEN I WILL SLAY HER.
YOU WOULD KILL ME, AFTER CALLING ME YOUR MOTHER?

IF MY MOTHER WERE A GOD, I COULD NOT KILL HER. BUT IF SHE IS A DEMON, I CAN.
SLICE

DAMN YOU, TSUNE-WAKAMARU.
SAVE ME, TSUNE-WAKAMARU
TSUNE-WAKAMARU...
THE OTHER ME THAT SLEEPS IN THIS LAND IS A CRUEL CREATURE.
SHE AND HER FOUR SERVANTS SHALL REVIVE, AND CURSE YOU EVEN AFTER YOU'RE REBORN.
SHWOOOM

SO YOU'RE THE SON OF THAT DEMON WOMAN?
I HAVE NO HORNS, BUT I'VE KEPT THIS FORM FOR 25 YEARS.
I SEALED AWAY MY VOICE AND LIVED AS A WANDERER.
SINCE SHE WAS MY MOTHER, I'M HALF-DEMON, BUT I STILL WISH TO LIVE AS A HUMAN.
WILL YOU SLAY ME ANYWAY?
I...
JUST WHO ARE YOU?

YOU SLEW THE DEMON WOMAN KUREHA HERE, IN A LAND WHERE DEMONS DO NOT DIE.
THE ONLY ONE WHO COULD DO THAT-
WOULD BE A GOD OR A DEMON.
JUST AS MY MOTHER WILLED...
I AM REBORN HERE AS A NAMELESS DEMON.
IN LIEU OF HORNS, I CARRY THIS SACRED BLADE TO KILL MY FELLOW DEMONS!
IT WAS ONLY LATER THAT THE PEOPLE WOULD COME KNOW THE NAME OF THE BLADE THAT COULD CUT THE FLESH OF DEMONS: ONIKIRIMARU...